

Verdict could open doors in future cases

A Will County Circuit Court jury has opened doors to employers' properties for reasonable inspections where employees claim certain conditions caused accidents.

The jury, in a precedent-setting case last week, awarded \$15,000 to Dorothy Rhodes in actual and punitive damages against Uniroyal Inc. The suit had been filed in 1974 for her husband, Harry, of 145 S. Kenard St. in Braidwood, because of an Aug. 21, 1973 industrial accident. He died before the suit came to trial after six years of delays.

When the suit was filed by attorney Arthur Lennon, the complaint claimed Rhodes was disabled at Uniroyal. He suffered burns about the eyes, face and body, requiring surgery.

Lennon had asked permission to inspect Uniroyal premises on the basis of possible legal action against persons or parties other than Uniroyal. The suit claimed certain equipment from another supplier malfunctioned.

The company denied the inspection request, based on national security. A spokesman said the company was manufacturing items restricted from discovery photos.

The suit, however, charged that by being barred from making claims against a third party, Rhodes had been denied constitutional rights of access to the courts against all potential defendants.

Lennon said his research showed there is no other case where a jury has awarded damages to a person claiming violation of constitutional rights by being banned from vital information for an employment-related lawsuit.

There was no indication if the case will be appealed. If the appeal is processed and the jury's verdict affirmed, employers would be required to open premises to employee representatives so a reasonable inspection could be made.